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SOME RECENT FRENCH PLAYS.<sup>1</sup>

## I.

Among the dramas which the Comédie Française has of late crowned with its talent, I have taken three for consideration. These three I have chosen because they are among the best known of recent productions, and because each seems separately characteristic of some one phase of modern existence as reflected on the modern stage. Furthermore, each seems, perforce and principally, to illustrate one particular aspect of the general dramatic problem: the one is essentially a study in situation; the other, a study in character; the greatest, an essay at such combination of movement and character as may best make real that war of ideas, that war of souls which is at once the most hidden and the highest life.

Of these three, two are successes of last season, while the fame of the third is still loud upon this and the other continent. The first two are *Notre Jeunesse* by M. Alfred Capus and *Le Duel* by M. Lavedan. The last is M. Octave Mirbeau's claim to remembrance and De Féraudy's unequivocal triumph—*Les Affaires sont les Affaires*.

Save for its prettiness, one hardly cares to linger upon *Notre Jeunesse*, which is indubitably the weakest of the three. M. Capus, known already for *La Veine*, *La Châtelaine* and more notably for *L'Adversaire*, has in this instance hardly shown himself equal to the difficulties of his problem. The play is remarkable only for its subject—which is, briefly stated, the adoption of a natural daughter after many years, not by her father, but by her father's legal wife, more or less against her father's will.

This turn seems novel and even startling. A new shudder was to be anticipated. Evidently, in order to bring about such a dramatic possibility—one might find the daughter natural enough, but hardly that adoption—regard must be had at once to the characters, their mental states and mutual relations, and to a convenient and consequent course of action. All must lead up to a culminating situation, where the improbable must seem inevitable, the shocking most human. Where

can M. Capus find a woman who will voluntarily adopt a young person, for whom she should have the strongest feminine antipathy? Having found her, how can he place her, best to provoke such a crisis? Again, what further circumstances of character and action will contribute a mitigating effect to the situation? Let us see how the playwright has striven to answer such questions.

Many of the prerequisites to the solution would seem to be supplied, if in the first place, the couple be childless; if the adoptive daughter, Lucienne, be a charming *ingénue*, inoffensive, affectionate, in dire need; if the father, Lucien Briant, be represented as a rather good, rather stupid, wholly will-less person, a shuttlecock tossed between a domineering father and an excellent wife; if this wife, Hélène, be a sweet sympathetic *provinciale*, apparently devoid of feminine jealousy, conscious of a lack in her life not filled by the daily round, the society of her husband and the vexations of old Briant. Now, with these data, let the scene be laid at Trouville, where the Briant family is on a visit, in a company which easily excites, almost dazzles Hélène. Let a member of this company lay incidental siege to her heart. In the revulsion from this incipient affair, will she not cry out to a friend—who, of course, has Lucienne in reserve to provide for—her need of a child and her determination to adopt one? Will not the friend naturally produce the girl, and after mutual remonstrance and revelation, will not this strangely assorted family agree on such a new scheme of living as an ideal fulfillment?

In such manner probably argued M. Capus; and on these lines was the scenario constructed. It was doubtless an excellent scenario—the rub came in the development.

For, given Hélène and the circumstances, one does not see that her final action is rendered plausible. Granted an unsatisfactory husband and a vexatious father-in-law, will the introduction of a grown young woman—for it is a child she naturally desired, and Hélène herself makes that point—an adult of unknown station, training, adaptability, tend to harmonize family relations? Allowing for Hélène's open-minded, warm-hearted disposition, can we expect sweet reasonableness to reach the point not only of forgiving, but of sanctioning and in a sense of continuing her husband's delinquent-

<sup>1</sup> *Notre Jeunesse*, Capus; *Les Affaires sont les Affaires*, Mirbeau; *Le Duel*, Lavedan.

cies? She is very woman of very woman; she is jealous enough of old Briant's influence on her husband; it is both inconsistent and repelling that she should do more than pardon this earlier infidelity, that she should positively recommend the admission of a new subject of dissension. Also, Trouville may be fascinating, and its constructive Don Juan a delight; she may feel herself wavering—"je suis honnête femme, mais je commence à m'en apercevoir"; but why should this particular adoption serve as a bulwark against that sort of living? Especially why, in any society, should the knowledge that one's husband has had his distractions deter one from following one's own?

I think we shall have to give it up. The problem is *not* solved. The situation is *not* saved. M. Capus has chosen to revamp the old natural child question—which, as one critic aptly remarks, is now *cause gagnée . . . sur le théâtre*—and has vainly striven to give it at once a new and a probable phase. It is to his credit that he has at any rate avoided the Scylla of the *pièce à thèse*, while perhaps giving into the Charybdis of the *comédie larmoyante*. He has also taken some pains with his character creation. Some one says that if Dumas *fils* is the father of the natural child, Capus is at least its uncle. This avuncular care he has shown towards Lucienne, who is all that a fond relative could desire. So, anyhow, one judges at first blush, which is the only blush. She seems altogether lovely, this delightful young person, who is modest—in both senses—well brought up, straightforward, self-respecting. She will not push herself forward. She will gain her livelihood by her hands first. She is indifferent, even cold, almost contemptuous in the presence of her father; but to Madame, her supposed protectress, she opens at once her frank young heart—which is illogical, but pretty and convenient.

The rôle was taken by Mlle. Piérat, who gained fame as the *ingénue* in *L'Autre danger*. Here was a true impersonation. It is rare to see anything more charming. Graybeards write of it almost with tears, of her candor, her artlessness, her appeal. Be the credit actress's or author's, here is some skill and some sentiment.

A few of the other characters are worthy of mention. Old Briant was capably handled by Leloir, an imposing, impedimental figure, looking

like an incarnation of the past, which indeed he represents in conversation and opinion. He is contemptuous of this society of *potins* and *pantins*, of this noise about adopting a person who should be ignored, whom *he* does ignore. He is despotic, a chronic kicker, "autoritaire et aigri." He is ridiculous on the stage—but off it, curiously enough, he is nearly always right.

His counterpart is Chartier, the man of the time, the man of the world, who, having loved "un million et demi environ," has rather retired and with his sister entertains the Briants. He is an example and defence of the new *régime*, for while an egoist at bottom and prone to compromise, he shows good sense and feeling towards his sister, and in acting for Lucienne. He even takes the brief for present-day society, after being worked up to the point by old Briant. The world—and is not this the dramatist's creed as well?—may no longer be heroic or beautiful; but it is more cordial and more habitable than ever before. Also, what we have lost in direct virtue we have gained, it seems, in sensibility.

The particular society which is here in question assuredly needed a defender. It is almost inconceivable that any serious dramatist—and we shall shortly see what claim M. Capus has to this title—will deliberately fill nearly two acts with a panoramic procession of *fêtes*, duels, gossip and what not, during which the action is left to take care of itself. When such objection is made, the author seeks to disprove it by violently denying it. But the fact remains that the sole excuse for such *hors-d'œuvres*—bating that of atmosphere, which it has never been held should absorb half a play—is in preparing the *état d'âme* of Hélène, exactly what it fails to do. We are left to infer that these pages of pulp and padding, artificial society *blague*, characters introduced with much trumpeting, who turn out of no consequence—that all this represents matter for preferential treatment on the part of the author. Such, indeed, we are given to understand by his critics, is what one has hitherto expected of M. Capus, at most a delicious froth, "des mots boulevardiers et des théories de brasserie moderne;" "des pirouettes plaisantes . . . ou quelque narquois éclat de rire;" as more or less capably expressing "en ce monde spécial de blasés, de demoiselles et de plaisantins, le vide

charmant ou se complaît leur perpétuelle ménagerie." In this light some of the comments recorded on the night of the *première* in last November, are worth hearing.—"Why, it is a *drama*!" exclaims one. "A *mêlo*," declares another. While a third, without eye to such tentative construction as we have analysed at the first, stoutly maintains of the greater part, "C'est du Capus" . . . that we know.

This then is our study in situation. This is our modern drama; for it is tinglingly modern, there can be no doubt about that. Despite a novel and encouraging grasp at conception, construction and characterization, despite some charm and much pleasantness, the play remains a poor attempt, wherein the epigram is substituted for psychology, bustle for action, puppets for humans, strings for motives, and for art, amusement.

## II.

Before quite leaving *Notre Jeunesse*, it might be remarked that the reproach of extreme feebleness, of sentimentality, with which no less a critic than M. Faguet condemns it, might be attributable to a quality as yet scarcely mentioned. There may be more powerful plays, declares Catulle Mendès—there is none more *aimable*. All the characters, such as they are, are sympathetic. "Ils sont tous bons et sensibles, dans cette pièce . . . Vous trouverez mieux que de l'optimisme; vous trouverez de la bonté." At any rate, no such remark will apply to *Les Affaires*. Here, goodness is barely heard of; here, none of the characters are likable, and most of them are detestable. Is it a compensation that they are living?

M. Octave Mirbeau is a member of the Académie Goncourt and the author of several novels, as well as of a play—*Les Mauvais Bergers*. But it is for *Les Affaires* that he is chiefly known. This was first represented at the Français in April, 1903. It was swift to impress the imagination of the Parisian public, who allowed its power, if not its perfection. It has been translated and excellently represented by Mr. Beerbohm Tree, at London, as well as by William H. Crane in this country, under the title of *Business is Business*. It is interesting to compare Mr. Tree's rendering of the principal rôle with that of De Féraudy, who created the part. In general, it may be said that

the former's version brings something more of humanity, of *bonhomie* into the play, without really impairing its essential grimness.

The commercial question, we are sufficiently aware, is *the* question of the day. Finance is the all-absorbing thing. The man of affairs is the protagonist, if not the hero, of his time. Any play, therefore, which portrays principally such a character, his atmosphere and his relations, must be accorded a burning actuality. And such a play is *Les Affaires*. Concerning its novelty or originality, there would be more to say. It has been anticipated for some things by such dramas as *Mercadet*, *La Question d'Argent*, *Mlle. de la Seiglière*, *Le Gendre de M. Poirier*, or *Mlle. de Marni*. Yet, in the one result which it set out to achieve, *Les Affaires* remains perhaps supreme. It is with the career and personality of Isidore Lechat, the financier, that we have to do. It is the faithfulness and force of such delineation that we have to test.

The play, then, offers us as a main study, the problem of character. The plot, the other personages, the situations, all are nothing, save in so far as they are related to the principal point. For the construction, we have merely successive incidents or accidents, not interlinked, not in the least consecutive and necessary; a series of lime-lights around the central figure of Lechat. As to the other characters, a word later. At present, one need only remember Germaine, the daughter, sullen, wearied, an idealist at war with her father and her environment, who has taken for lover a chemist in Lechat's employ; and the poor narrow mother, a vulgar soul, oppressed by her magnificence and awed by her family.

Let us consider M. Mirbeau's envisagement of his problem—the problem of exhibiting with truth and conviction the very actual and very terrible monster of finance, in all his rapaciousness, his repulsiveness, his putative greatness. The portrait, as M. Doumic points out, is not intended to represent the great modern financier, the colossus such as those whose names we are wearied of hearing. It is a lower, commoner type that is treated. It is "le faiseur, l'agioteur, le brasseur d'affaires." It is the shark rather than the leviathan of these somewhat muddy waters. It is the shrewd, soulless, heartless man of business, the vulgar, soiled mate-

rialist, the thief who arrives, the man of strength and without hypocrisy, glorying in his shame, redolent of his slime, yet always strangely predominant in his personality.

We see him surrounded by his acquired luxury, in his princely domain. This he has wrested from an expiring nobility. It is a *décor* meant to set off the salt of the earth, and, where he has not altered it, altogether too splendid for this unlovely creature.

The first scene, between mother and daughter, is intended chiefly to illustrate the bored and antagonistic attitude of Germaine; but it announces Lechat as well. From the beginning we are not predisposed in his favor. His wife declares him vain, insolent, and—though honest in his way!—fond of lying and deceit. His specialty, his ideal is to “rouler les gens.” We hear of his cruelty to his gardener, whom he has dismissed curtly, without provision, because, forsooth, the gardener’s wife is pregnant, and he, Isidore, cannot allow children around his handsome park; of his cruelty to an old woman, found guilty of gathering dead fagots in his wood; of his cruelty to the very birds, upon whose little heads he has indiscriminately put a price—so much a blackbird, so much a nightingale—wishing to exterminate the whole race, without considering that some are as helpful to growth as others are pernicious.

He enters blatant and triumphant, with a chorus of *vivats* from bought workmen, with a tag of two sharps, who will try to-morrow to outwit him in a deal. These are MM. Phinck and Gruggh—not unholy names I hope?—though surely unpleasing to a Paris ear.

Isidore begins at once boasting of his automobile, which has, it seems, made excellent time, and has had the honor of doing appreciable damage on the route. It is significant that Mr. Tree, in his version, ran his machine up to the stage. It was too good a symbol to be wasted. The machine is a juggernaut, like its master, powerful and destructive; both make for the material, both are relentless and regardless of humanity.

“Our hero” is foul-mouthed from the start. He flaunts his lack of manners, his ignorance and contempt of polite or even decent usage. He prefers to *tutoyer* the sharps, whose names he has pardonably forgotten. He presents them to his

wife by stating that “elle n’a pas d’usage”:—and to his daughter as a “mauvaise tête.”

He rejoices in his nickname of Le Chat-Tigre. He boasts of everything, of his bought journals, of his spendthrift villainous son, of his contempt for the aristocracy and for the poor alike, of his domain above all. He shows them the enormous plan of this, with a multicolored miniature of himself gambolling in each of its divisions—to signify possession. To-morrow they shall see all of its seven thousand *hectares*, its almost royal appanages, covering two departments. He boasts equally of his *château*, which has apartments in the style of every reign from Henri II. He takes pleasure in violence, in meanly insulting his poor intendant, who, as a fallen noble, is made to remove his hat.

His agricultural notions are foolish and wild. Witness the matter of the birds. This is to show the weakness of specialism, even where the specializing is in the realm of practical affairs. He manifests a riotous contempt for books; the sharps please him because they never read. Neither does he.—“C’est mon orgueil à moi. Et cela n’empêche pas que je suis Isidore Lechat, Châtelain de Vauperdu, riche à cinquante millions, et que je possède un journal ou je dirige l’opinion politique, littéraire, philosophique et tout le bataclan.”

At this point, a medley of guests, whom he has invited and forgotten, throng in, to the dismay of poor Mme. Lechat. This hurly-burly passes off, leaving the stage free for the revolt of Germaine, who, with her chemist-lover, decides to flee from a situation grown intolerable.

So far Lechat has appeared as rough and cynical, as hard and downright, as possessed of an enormous egotism. But this is only in general. His more especial self can appear only in business, and it is in the negotiations with Phinck and Gruggh in the next act that we are to look for a fuller revelation of the man.

Here, in an apartment furnished with tasteless extravagance, with “bric-à-brac cher et hurlant,” with a gaudy full-length portrait of Isidore himself, with a ridiculous *manière* Cupid, who extends a rose to these sentimental people—it is a question of going to church. Poor Madame is seeking a companion. Her husband, she says, is readily excusable from conscientious scruples—“il est anticlérical cette année.” But will Germaine not

go? Germaine will not. Will not Germaine then say what is the matter with her? Germaine, again, will not. There is a scene of reciprocal unpleasantness between mother and daughter, after which there is a long and vehement scene between the two lovers. I wish there were space to transcribe the passages where Germaine, in her savage manner, in her greatest *tirade*, gives at the same time her own best defence and the appalling effect of this atmosphere. Even after her best moments, this splendid castle is for her the heavy, stony symbol of death and destruction. It all shouts at her Crime and Theft. It is all swimming in visions of tears and of blood. "Et ce qu'il y avait de joie en moi s'est changé, tout d'un coup en souffrance, et ce qu'il y avait d'amour en moi est devenu de la révolte et de la haine . . ."

And when Lucien objects that her father, terrible as he is, has done great things, she hurls back—"De grandes choses! ah! Laisse-moi aller jusqu'au bout . . . Pas une fois je n'ai rencontré des yeux tranquilles, et des visages heureux; pas une fois je n'ai entendu la musique d'une parole de douceur et de bonté. La hâte, la fièvre, le malheur, le rire grimaçant, l'apothéose du crime! Des gens venaient sans cesse, puis repartaient qu'on ne voyait plus . . . Figures de complices, quelquefois; mais, le plus souvent, figures de victimes, et pauvres figures inconnues, plus douloureuses de m'avoir été révélées, sanglots et détresses, par les récits de mon père, car, le soir, à table, devant les étrangers et devant nous, il nous racontait ses bons coups. Avec une gaieté sinistre, avec de véritables rires d'assassin, il nous disait comment il avait roulé celui-ci, volé celui-la, déshonoré cet autre. Tu me reproches de n'avoir pas de pitié? Ah! Lucien, mais je n'ai vécu que de la pitié durant ces années maudites. Je ne pouvais croiser dans la rue une femme et des petits enfants en deuil sans me dire, 'C'est peut-être ma faute!' Je ne pouvais voir pleurer quelqu'un sans me dire: 'C'est peut-être à cause de nous qu'il pleure!'" And she tells the story of a banker whom her father ruined and drove to suicide, while sneering at his threats.

But let us to this Lechat and to "business." It is here that his shrewdness is supposed to shine. His methods in the deal with the two sharps are direct, disconcerting, even brutal. He laughs at

Gruggh's suggestion of philanthropy in business, and hurries him over general considerations. He calls for cards on the table. The proposition concerns the establishment of an electric plant on a site in the secret possession of Gruggh and Pinck. Will Lechat furnish the capital for exploitation—a small matter of 8,000,000 fr.? The enterprise is of course magnificent and profitable. In the sharp play of dialogue that follows, Lechat's rapier is always on top. He completely dominates the others. There is a chance here for much good acting, and both of his impersonators took it. He arises from time to time, turns the reflectors on his portrait and examines it fondly, with evident approval, with apostrophes and gestures.

Certainly, Lechat is quick to seize the essential points in the game. He shatters in short order a mythical outside ownership which the two had alleged. He declares that the proposed site is in the *zone militaire*, and hence, exposed to numberless restrictions. And when it comes to a question of profit, he says the owners shall have one share, and he the other. "But we are three!" exclaim the others. "I don't see but two," maintains Lechat. "You, the owners, one; I, the capitalist, one; that's two." The direction shall be his alone.

He knows the card up his sleeve is the best. He can lie in wait, in spite of his inordinate desire to blow a trumpet. The two conspirators are ushered out, abashed and disconsolate. They will draw up the contract in forced compliance with his demands.

Lechat is vulnerable in one point. To save him from utter condemnation, he must have one weakness or virtue. This is his affection for his son, who in return for demonstrations dryly demands 10,000 louis. It is for a debt of honor, out of which Isidore regrets there is no way to squirm. The son shall have the money, if he regains it as he has lost it—which he can well do. Lechat caresses him, delights in his naughtiness, in his sporting associations, confides to him that *maman* is *toujours rasante*—and that fortunately he has found an angelic substitute.

The third act is the most crowded. The scene with the son is practically carried over. The spendthrift scamp informs Isidore that he cannot bring his friends to dine in the paternal man-

sion, in the paternal presence. There are too many stories about Lechat to suit this set. If his father needs to treat with them and wants his help, why he must pay for it and roundly. Has not he, the youngster, been taught that such is business? But this is the one thing that wounds Isidore, who, like many parents, would have his children other than he has made them.

But the Marquis de Porcellet, his neighbor, his debtor, is at his gates; and in the scene with this gentleman, Isidore again changes front. He shows more regard for the amenities. He actually listens to the other's arguments, shows much diplomacy and some reasonableness. This is, however, only a surface coat of manners. He takes from the start the upper hand of the Marquis, spite of the latter's birth and breeding.

Lechat refuses to lend him more money, either on land which is already mortgaged to the hilt; or on his honor, which, it is explained, is not a negotiable asset; or on his chances of a succession. The Marquis is about to leave, when Lechat holds him for a proposition. Then ensues a war of ideas, in which the Marquis stands for the past, for something of chivalry, for his point of honor, for scorn of the practical—all of which Lechat discounts, with much contempt of grand words.

Yet the Marquis is not *intransigent*. He is willing to open his mind to certain things—"pourvu qu'elles n'attendent en rien à l'idéal que je me suis fait de la vie." To which Isidore responds, "Oui, seulement voilà, elles y attendent toujours." Still, upon this hint he speaks. He proposes, quite simply, to marry Germaine to the other's son, to present them with the land in question, and the Marquis with a handsome *douceur*. This is generous; for he is quite fond of the Marquis' lands, almost as fond as he is of the Marquis.

The nobleman, naturally enough, repels the idea with some violence, and Lechat is back at him immediately with arguments, reasonings, coaxings. How can the Marquis stand being ruined? "J'ai été ruiné deux fois. Ça n'est pas drôle! Mais moi j'ai du ressort." He insists that there should be nothing repulsive in this transaction, believing and proclaiming that everything is bought and sold.—"Les affaires sont des échanges: on échange de l'argent, de la terre, des titres, des mandats électoraux, de l'intelligence, de la situation sociale,

des places, de l'amour, du génie; ce qu'on a contre ce qu'on n'a pas. Il n'y a rien de plus licite, et rassurez-vous, rien de plus honorable." With such astute wheedling does he finally persuade the Marquis, astounding him with a knowledge of his most private affairs, seeking paradoxically to make him believe that if there is any one who compromises in this bargain, who is bought and sold, it is Lechat himself.

Accordingly the Marquis taunts him with striving after all to gain, by an alliance with the nobility just what he declares he contemns—grandeur, tradition and elegance. Isidore still vaunts the superiority of his bandit, pirate species—who at least promote individual movement and progress—and impudently declares that the Church itself would recommend this marriage. The Marquis, driven to it, at last gives his gloomy and reluctant consent. Isidore has scored another triumph, just before the wheel of Nemesis will turn.

So accustomed is he to conquer, that he does not even prepare his daughter. He orders her in, like a slave to the market, a victim to the sacrifice, and on her clear refusal, on her declaration that she has a lover, all that is vilest and vulgarest in him comes to the top. He strives a little to hold the Marquis *quand même*, then lets him go, calling him *canaille*. He seizes Germaine by the wrists, and tries to force her to the ground. Follows a vilifying scene between the two, after which epithets would seem exhausted. Lucien the lover is called in, a signal for fresh abuse. Lechat cannot understand that they do not want his money, repeats insistently his threat of disinheriting Germaine. Finally forced to it, as he thinks, he offers to buy Lucien's absence, and is again flouted. With impossible threats, he dashes out, leaving the stage clear for an affecting scene—all too late—between mother and daughter.

The lovers leave. Isidore, on again, sneers at his wife's sorrow, ends by outraging her maternal feelings, is denounced even by her, and still stands undismayed and unconquered. But the tragedy culminates with swift sure strokes. The one thing that can move him comes. The intendant rushes in, bringing the awful news that his beloved son has been killed by an automobile accident. Isidore is crushed, overwhelmed, slow to believe it, as he

was slow to believe Germaine's defection. Then in a fearful paroxysm, to which only "Magda" offers a parallel, of anger, apoplexy, fear and fury, he seizes the wretched intendant, violently shakes him, tries to stagger out, falls into the arms of our two sharps, who break into this time of grief with their contract artfully worded to give them the best of it. They are his friends, his dear friends, in his misery. But they regret; they must leave; will he not just sign the contract? He waives that, and wishes them to lament with him. They insist. He takes the paper, glances at it, perceives at once their perfidy, bursts out in wrath. With wonderful mastery he controls himself and dictates to the cowed rascals new terms which they are compelled to write and sign. He crushes the papers into his pocket and totters out to his dead, having achieved his master-stroke of business in his hour of sorrow. . . . "Les affaires sont les affaires."

One sees how difficult it is not to be carried away by the current of this thing, how difficult to judge it calmly. The effect is that of being swept along in a nasty nightmare, in a particularly dingy and unpleasant train, with jolts and jarrings infinite. The style is broken, telegraphic, to correspond. Tears and triumphs, passion and action are thrown at us to digest in lumps. It has all the grimness and terror of tragedy, without its large majesty.

Let us hear the critics. One declares that last scene of a Shakespearean horror. "Elle devait être sublime. Elle l'est théoriquement. En fait, au théâtre, elle paraît outrée, elle ne passe pas." And that, because it lacks preparation and inevitability. M. Mendès finds its terror comparable to that of the antique drama. . . . "Ici le *fatum*, l'ananké, c'est l'argent. Balzac modernise Eschyle." But M. Faguet has said the last word when he declares the play "plus violente que forte, plus âpre que profonde et plus tumultueuse que douée d'un vrai mouvement."

One exception taken by many, and that with evident reason, is the lack of any principle of contrast. Isidore's figure is unrelieved. The despicable should be thrown into relief by the admirable, and we have seen that none of the characters are really attractive. It weakens the effect that the people whom he outwits, whom he oppresses,

should be little better than himself. If he crushes and terrorizes the two sharps, they are common rascals, deserving no better fate. If he turns the screws on the Marquis, the Marquis is far from being a noble representative of his race, does his ideals mere lip-service and consents to a *lâche* compromise. Within the family, the same truth holds in a lesser degree. We can indeed feel some sympathy for poor Mme. Lechat, who is the best of a bad set. She is so avaricious that she will not kill a chicken for dinner until sure of her guests; she is uneasy in the midst of her splendor, declaring that even the old portraits of the castle look coldly upon her, demanding what does this woman here. She is narrow, vulgar and unsatisfactory whether a mother or wife; but in each relation she is affectionate and really faithful amid bewilderments—especially to Lechat whom she constantly defends and excuses.

How can we sympathize with Lucien, who is a truckler and seducer? Or with Germaine who is an undutiful and sinning daughter? But Germaine is a problem by herself. We see her first indifferent and wearied; then sullen and defiant; then militant and declamatory. Through all these stages, her inner savageness, her actual hate for her father, her scorn of her mother, her brooding sense of injury and despair make themselves felt. But by way of relief she is tender-hearted to outsiders, to servants, to the intendant, she is considerate of the poor. And how she has suffered through it all! Her main fault is of course the fact that she has a lover—for which she has her defence. The French judgment on her is prompt and complete. Her mother declares that even if Lechat were the worst of men, he is still Germaine's father, and it is not for Germaine to condemn him. Here the critics are practically unanimous. M. Doumic affirms uncompromisingly—"Pour caractériser la conduite, l'attitude, le langage de cette jeune fille, il n'y a qu'un mot qui serve: elle est odieuse." She is an unnatural daughter. To insult one's father is intolerable. Her own *honnêteté* is tarnished. She is atrocious. Again, I was interested in the opinion of some French women, who, while not vociferous against Lechat—they seemed to consider him as at least rather a good head for a household—could not stigmatize too sternly the unfilial and unvirtuous



Germaine. This is essentially the French point of view, where the family is so much more of a solidarity, where to be unfilial is the worst of crimes, and to be unvirtuous one must be married.

Germaine receives more pity in the Tree version where her language is milder, and her lover is of the harmless English variety. It must be conceded, however, that in the original a chance was lost in drawing Germaine, as a chance was lost in the manipulation of the business scenes, and in the neglect to make the death of the son necessary and coherent. This has been variously regarded as interposition of Providence, of the melodrama, of morality. By such things is the quality of the play impaired.

Yet with all its faults we hate it still. And where there is hate, there is horror and a grim commanding force. Isidore Lechat is likely to remain an abiding type. Where do we find his like? Old Grandet is mild beside him, and Bel Ami beautiful, and any *arriviste* acceptable. We feel that in the marrow he is fundamentally *true*, that his standard and his villainies are *living*, true and living for this age, if for none other. Mirbeau's prototypes for the character were recognized by his audience. If the real financier is somewhat better-mannered, more cultured, more taciturn, more dissimulating; if there are certain exaggerations for dramatic and even for comic effect—we can strip off the disguises as we do with Dickens, leaving more flesh and blood.

Wherein the play really fails as drama, wherein it is bad art, is in its depressing ugliness. Where is a lovable character? Or a sentiment of beauty? Or a movement of elevation? Not its pessimism damns it, not its creeping sense of desolation, but sordidness, but grime, but the representation of the foul pimple, the wrinkle, the bruises on the face of humanity. Why paint a toad when devotion has left us temples? We are far from the time when poets declared truth and beauty one. We should know better now. We should keep them distinct. By some such principle is the decrepit monster of naturalism to be slain—but we are still watching the contortions of his dying spasms.—I turn with pleasure to a clearer note, a drama of unmistakable beauty, a more enduring monument.

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## CORRESPONDENCE.

ROBERT HERRICK.

*To the Editors of Mod. Lang. Notes.*

SIRS:—Robert Herrick's *Hesperides* and *Golden Numbers* went almost unnoticed by his contemporaries; indeed, Prof. Saintsbury declares that they attracted absolutely no attention. The following item may therefore be of interest. In *Naps upon Parnassus*, by P. Q., published in 8vo. in 1658, is a poem, "Upon the Infernal Shades of the Author's Poems; or, The Hooded Hawk," stanza five of which runs:

And then Flaccus Horace,  
He was but a sowr-ass,  
And good for nothing but Lyrics:  
There's but One to be found  
In all English ground  
Writes as well; who is hight Robert Herick.

Who "P. Q." was, I have no idea; he may have merely wanted a rhyme for "lyrick," inasmuch as Herrick himself used the same rhyme. In any case, we have here one of the very few contemporary notices of Robert Herrick.

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## BRIEF MENTION.

Additional information on the Weinhold Library, donated to the University of California by Mr. John D. Spreckels (cf. *Mod. Lang. Notes*, 1905, p. 256) is contained in an article by Prof. Hugo K. Schilling in the *University Chronicle*, Vol. VIII, No. 2. We are glad to learn from Prof. Schilling's statements that "a catalogue of the books of particular value for original work and of such others as are not likely to be found elsewhere in this country will be published at an early date for the benefit of librarians and scholars in other universities." We also wish to concur in Mr. Schilling's contention that collections of books placed in seminary rooms for the use of instructors and advanced students ought theoretically to consist of duplicates throughout, and not of copies withdrawn from the general library.

H. C.